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Articles in Today's Clips Monday, January 8, 2007

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Mother pursues deal in baby bottle bleach case

Saturday, January 06, 2007

By John Agar

The Grand Rapids Press

HASTINGS -- After losing rights to her two young children, a Hastings mother accused of spiking a baby bottle with bleach is trying to reach a plea deal.

Jennifer Clement, 21, charged with first-degree child abuse, waived a probable-cause hearing Friday in Barry County District Court. Her attorney, David Makled, said his client and prosecutors "may be able to reach a resolution" before her Feb. 8 arraignment in Circuit Court.

Free on bond, she declined comment. First-degree child abuse is a felony punishable by 15 years in prison.

Clement is accused of poisoning her daughter, Belle Clement, 8 months old at the time, then delaying a call for help for an hour. The baby was eventually taken by ambulance Sept. 8 to Pennock Hospital, where she was treated for ingesting bleach.

The girl, who recovered, and her 3-year-old brother, Christopher Anderson, were placed in foster care after the poisoning.

Last month, Probate Judge William Doherty terminated Clement's parental rights. Clement has since challenged the ruling in the state Court of Appeals.

Doherty determined Clement could not provide a safe environment for the children. Prosecutors did not try to terminate parental rights of the children's fathers, who are allowed visitation at the discretion of protective-services workers, court records showed.

The children are wards of the court, supervised by the state Department of Human Services.

Authorities said in court records Clement had grown frustrated with her children before the poisoning. When police responded to her 911 call, officers found the children living in filthy conditions.

In her 911 call, she sobbed and appeared frantic to get help for her baby, who turns 1 next week. She blamed her son.

"My son, he's 3, I don't know how he got a hold of it, but he put bleach in my ... daughter's bottle. ... It's stinky, and she smells like it really bad," she said, according to a recording of her 911 call.

She also suggested an 18-year-old woman at her house "had something to do with the bleach," records said.

Police said the home had a strong odor of bleach. Police detected bleach on the baby's breath and clothes. Investigators recovered several ounces of bleach solution in the baby's bottle.

A day earlier, she allegedly told a friend that she was "overwhelmed and wished she did not have kids right now," authorities said in court records.

She also wrote poems, the friend told investigators, "stating things about not being ready to have kids, needing a way out and wishing things could be different."

ADRIAN DAILY TELEGRAM

LOCAL NEWS BRIEFS

Saturday, January 6, 2007 9:57 PM EST

Baby injury charged

ADRIAN — A 39-year-old Adrian man was arraigned on a second-degree child abuse charge Friday in Lenawee County District Court for allegedly injuring a month-old baby while assaulting the mother.

The baby boy was injured Dec. 23 when he was knocked to the floor or into a wall by David Allen Villarreal, according to Adrian police reports. A personal recognizance bond was continued pending a preliminary examination on Jan. 12.

Reports said Villarreal assaulted his wife, knocking over the chair she was sitting in while holding the baby. A misdemeanor charge was filed earlier against Villarreal for assaulting his wife. The second-degree child abuse charge carries a maximum four-year prison term.



Drug charge dismissed

Saturday, January 06, 2007

HOLLAND -- A misdemeanor drug charge against a Holland woman once accused of causing her infant daughter's death in Texas has been dismissed. The marijuana possession charge against Esther Gonzales, 24, was dismissed because of evidentiary and other issues, her attorney, Robert Hamilton, said Friday. Gonzales and her husband, Cipriano Gonzales IV, were charged in March with murder of their 2-month-old daughter, Cynthea. The charges later were reduced to felony child abuse, and the couple is free on bond, awaiting a Jan. 10 pre-trial hearing. Esther Gonzales was charged in November with the marijuana-related misdemeanor.

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Linden man pleads guilty after online child-sex sting

January 7, 2007

LIVINGSTON DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

A Linden man admitted Friday that he tried to solicit sex via the Internet from someone he thought was a 14-year-old girl.

Timothy Ryan Dunlap, 24, faces up to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to child abusive commercial activity, accosting a child for immoral purposes and using a computer to commit both crimes.

Dunlap also pleaded guilty to carrying a concealed weapon.

Police said Dunlap arranged a meeting for sex with a person he thought was a 14-year-old girl, but who was really an undercover officer.

When Dunlap arrived for the meeting, police arrested him and found a knife with a 4-inch blade in his vehicle.

Sentencing is scheduled for Feb. 15.

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Reporting abuse gets easier

3 counties set to unveil toll-free phone numbers

January 7, 2007

BY SHABINA S. KHATRI

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A new 24-hour toll-free number to report child and adult abuse in Macomb County rolls out this week, and officials are encouraging anyone with questions or concerns to call.

The number, which begins operating Wednesday, is the same one the county has been using for about seven years, but it will now use the toll-area code 877 instead of the local 586.

The new number is part of a statewide rollout of toll-free abuse-reporting hotlines. Wayne County also will introduce a new toll-free number Wednesday, with Oakland County expected to follow later this month.

A slew of prominent child abuse cases, including recent reports of 8-year-old Warren twins allegedly tortured by their adoptive mother, have given hotline new prominence, said Theresa Morin, the county's central intake supervisor for adult and child abuse, adding that the teacher who reported suspected abuse of the twins used the hotline.

Based on information provided by the caller, hotline staffers will either refer the report to a social worker for investigation or provide information on resources to the concerned caller.

While educators, social workers and doctors are required by law to report concerns of abuse, neighbors and relatives also are encouraged to call.

"We really want people to call even if they have any questions," Morin said. "They don't have to know for certain -- even if they've seen something that is of concern to them. Sometimes it's a piece of the puzzle for us also."

Referrals can be anonymous, she added.

In Macomb County, referrals for child and adult abuse were up slightly in 2006 compared with 2005, which Morin attributed to more awareness of the hotline.

Changing the number from a local call to a toll-free one, she added, might help remove a potential barrier to making a call.

Contact **SHABINA S. KHATRI** at 586-469-8087 or skhatri@freepress.com.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published January 7, 2007

January 2007 is Stalking Awareness Month

LANSING — Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has proclaimed January 2007 Stalking Awareness Month in Michigan. Michigan was among the first states in the nation to observe Stalking Awareness Month.

"It is important for stalking survivors to know they are not alone and that there is help," said Debra Cain, executive director of the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board. "Stalking Awareness Month affords us the opportunity to share this critical information with survivors in Michigan."

Stalking may create a real and frightening threat to victims and their loved ones. Stalkers often are unpredictable and dangerous. In fact, an estimated 76 percent of female homicide victims and 85 percent of attempted female homicide victims have been stalked in the year prior to the crime. Michigan law defines stalking as "a willful course of conduct involving repeated or continuing harassment of another individual that would cause a reasonable person to feel terrorized, frightened, intimidated, threatened, harassed or molested and that actually causes the victim to feel terrorized, frightened, intimidated, threatened, harassed or molested."

"Stalking is a serious crime that has the potential to escalate into a very dangerous situation," said Colonel Peter C. Munoz, director of the Michigan State Police. "If you believe you may be a victim of stalking, I encourage you to contact your nearest law enforcement agency."

Stalking became a crime in Michigan in 1993. The Michigan State Police report there were approximately 27,000 reported incidents of intimidation/stalking in Michigan during 2005. About 1.5 million people are victims of stalking in the United States every year. One in 12 women and one in 45 men will be stalked in their lifetimes. Seventy-seven percent of women and 64 percent of men know their stalker.

"Along with reporting the incidents to law enforcement, victims also can contact their local domestic or sexual violence program for advocacy, counseling and, if necessary, shelter services," said Marianne Udow, Department of Human Services director.

The Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board funds agencies that provide those services statewide. Members of the legislatively enacted board are appointed by the governor and are charged with leading statewide efforts to eliminate domestic violence in the state. The board is administratively housed within the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Individuals who are being stalked or abused can find help by calling the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE or 1-800-787-3224 TTY.

For more information about the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board including the Domestic Violence Resource Directory, visit its Web site at www.michigan.gov/domesticviolence

ADRIAN DAILY TELEGRAM

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Saturday, January 6, 2007 9:57 PM EST

Equal Parenting distorted

To the editor:

I am writing in reply to Ms. Renee Batt's letter of Dec. 22 in which she thanks state Rep. Dudley Spade for not voting for House Bill 5267, the Equal Parenting Bill.

Ms. Batt stated that laws that help victims and children are needed, not ones that help abusers control the mothers of their children. The fact is that laws to help domestic violence already exist. HB 5267 would not have done anything to change these laws.

The Equal Parenting Bill would be in the best interests of Michigan's children. By refusing to vote for the bill, Rep. Spade has ignored the facts. The bill calls for "clear and convincing evidence" to find a parent unfit, unwilling or unable to parent their child(ren). Any parent with a documented history of abuse or neglect would easily be found "unfit." Facts and proof only, please. No more hearsay or false allegations would be heard, a very positive change!

The Michigan Bar Association has reported approximately 10 percent of divorce and custody cases involve "high conflict situations." This leaves a huge majority — 90 percent of parents, both custodial and non-custodial alike — who are not abusive. They, and their children, are being discriminated against!

Domestic violence is gender-neutral. Abuse against anyone is a terrible thing, but is not a "male phenomenon." The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) has been used and recognized for years as a measure of domestic violence. CTS is often quoted as stating "2 million wives are abused by their husbands every year," and that "a woman is abused by a man every 15 seconds." The media and other reports don't bother mentioning that the same study also shows that a man is abused by a woman every 14 seconds, and at least 2 million men are abused by their wives every year!

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, no more than 16 percent of all child maltreatment is perpetrated by the child's biological father. This compares to 78 percent of cases of maltreatment of children of all ages involving female perpetrators (and 95 percent of medical neglect cases). Equal parenting would be a deterrent!

Rep. Spade has done a huge injustice to his constituents as did others who voted against equal parenting and for the divorce industry and others who profit from it in Michigan. It

is obvious who they support — and it's not the families or children of Michigan!

Phillip N. Wurm, Hastings

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The Daily Telegram

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MONDAY JANUARY 8, 2007 Last modified: *Saturday, January 6, 2007 12:02 AM EST*

Six girls accused of plotting riot

— Prosecutors say a police investigation disrupted plans for a disturbance at the Adrian Training School.

By [Dennis Pelham](#)

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN — Six teenage residents at the Adrian Training School are facing felony conspiracy to riot charges over a Dec. 3 incident involving an assault on another girl at the state-run youth facility.

Two 17-year-old girls were arraigned by video from the Lenawee County Jail Friday afternoon on the conspiracy charges. A district court magistrate scheduled them for preliminary examinations on Jan. 12 before Judge Natalia M. Koselka. They remain in jail in lieu of bonds totaling \$10,500 each.

No actual riot occurred at Adrian Training School, but a Michigan State Police trooper who investigated an assault complaint against two girls last month turned up evidence that a larger disturbance was planned.

“What we’ve got here is several more people involved in the incident,” said Lenawee County Prosecutor Irving Shaw. There is evidence of “a fair amount of planning to create a disturbance,” he said, that would have enabled some residents to commit planned assaults.

Shaw said it is the first time he recalls seeing reports of a disturbance being planned by a group of residents at the facility. There have been occasional disruptions and scuffles during group therapy sessions or isolated fights or assaults on staff or other residents, he said.

This case involves a number of weapons being prepared, he said, including a handmade knife and a club-like weapon.

Shaw said he is not certain how close the residents allegedly involved came to carrying out plans for a riot, but there is evidence in the police report it was more than just talk.

“The report describes some images and activity as captured by surveillance cameras,” Shaw said.

“Sometimes it’s possible to prove a conspiracy, oftentimes it’s not,” Shaw said. The video evidence in this case, he said, will support the charges that a plan was made and steps taken toward carrying it out.

A conspiracy conviction requires proof that participants engaged in a criminal plan to actually act in some way aimed at carrying out the intended crime.

Michigan Department of Human Services spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said Friday that she could not comment on the alleged riot conspiracy.

The residents’ privacy rights do not allow the agency to make any comments on what happened at the facility, Sorbet said.

Arraigned Friday were residents Sharde Marie Thomas and Equalla Archell Davis. Four other residents were named as taking part in the conspiracy but have not yet been officially charged as adults in district court or as juveniles in probate court.

If convicted of the charges of conspiracy to incite or cause a prison riot, the girls face sentences of up to 10 years in prison.

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Published January 7, 2007

[From Lansing State Journal]

Teen's death leaves Lansing family struggling for answers

Flirting with trouble cost 17-year-old his life

By Kathleen Lavey
Lansing State Journal

At first glance, the facts surrounding the death of Dennis Duane Gibbons Jr. seem simple.

The 17-year-old from Lansing climbed through the roof vent of a dry cleaning store, where he suffocated during an attempted breaking and entering.

His body was found Dec. 19 by a furnace repairman.

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His family buried him Dec. 28 at a funeral attended by more than 200 people.

However, that is just the very end of a longer and more complicated story that should serve as a cautionary tale for parents everywhere, his grieving family says.

"It's true he was doing something he shouldn't have been doing," said his aunt, Andrea

Gibbons of Lansing. "But this could be your son. This could be your nephew. This is still a child who made a bad decision."

Lansing police continue to investigate the case, said Lt. Bruce Ferguson. "We're still trying to locate the possibility that somebody else was involved," he said. "The case is not closed."

[Enlarge photo](#)

(Photo by ROD SANFOR/Lansing Senseless death: Dennis and I picture of Dennis Jr., Dennis' s Thursday at their home in Lan after crawling into a roof vent,

Help for teens

"There are a lot of things you troubled teenager on the right deputy court administrator for Ingham County's Family Court going to listen?"

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The teenager had a few scrapes but no internal injuries. He died of what is technically known as "positional asphyxia," said Dr. Dean Sienko, Ingham County medical examiner.

"He was in a position where it was not possible for him to breathe adequately," Sienko said. "Adolescents of this age ... don't appreciate the danger involved in some of the things they do, whether it's driving, some recreational sports or something like this."

Love and discipline

Dennis Duane Gibbons Jr. grew up in Lansing, living sometimes with his father and stepmother, Dennis Gibbons Sr. and Debra Gibbons, and sometimes with his maternal grandmother.

He was loved.

He was cared for.

His dad worked hard at discipline.

Dennis Jr. - known in his family as "Little Dennis" - had a natural charisma, an easygoing nature and a willingness to help others.

But Little Dennis also was a kid who struggled with a learning disability, got suspended from high school and was on probation for breaking and entering at the time of his death.

Even as a preschooler, Little Dennis was charming, said his stepmother, Debra Gibbons.

"He was nonstop," she said. "He was always talking. He liked the Ninja Turtles."

His grieving father and stepmother break into smiles when they remember how much he enjoyed fishing, fixing cars, basketball and rap music.

"Dennis was taught to work on cars, and he liked to brag about how he fixed things," Debra Gibbons said. "One day, my friend was over here, and he fixed the air conditioner on her car."

Struggling at school

Diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, Little Dennis enjoyed the social aspects of school but struggled academically.

In an attempt to help him, his dad moved him from Lansing's Dwight Rich Middle School to Gardner Middle School.

"He felt like people were picking on him" because of his disability, his dad said.

So he moved him into Sankofa Shule Academy of Lansing, a charter school, during the 2003-2004 school year. There, teacher Hilary Waddles saw his potential.

"He was not a bad kid," Waddles said. "He was not the kind that started fights or arguments with the other students. He was kind of a class-clown type."

In one-on-one situations with adults, Waddles found the teen to be respectful and productive.

Here are some resources for if need help:

- Community Mental Health of counties offers family counseli the Web at [www.ceicmh.org](#).
- Child and Family Services of substance abuse counseling fo check the Web at [www.childar](#)
- Camp Highfields offers a var to help teens take responsibili more at [www.highfields.org](#).
- The MSU Family and Child C by doctoral interns at Michigar with which they can help inclu communication and parenting. the Web at [www.fce.msu.edu/](#)
- St. Vincent Catholic Charities program, which provides ment also has a family counseling c [www.stvcc.org](#) or call 323-473

Case is still open

Lansing police continue to inve of Dennis Duane Gibbons Jr. " information, we'd love to have Ferguson of the Lansing Police

- If you have information abou break-ins, contact Sgt. Eric Pa Precinct's detective bureau, 27

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Fearing his academic difficulties made him prone to drop out of high school, she worked with his dad to get him into Lansing's Hill Center when he entered ninth grade.

"I think he needed to be somewhere he could get more individualized attention," she said. "He was very good with hands-on stuff and problem-solving type of stuff."

She also recalled his dream of creating rap music: "He'd do little freestyles for me, and he was actually kind of good at it."

Waddles was shocked to hear the news of his death. "It's just such a terrible way to die," she said. "There are some kids that you think, 'Unless someone steps in, they're going to come to a bad end.' He was just not like that."

Negative changes

Little Dennis' family started noticing negative changes in his behavior during his high school years. He was suspended for six months from Hill Center after a knife was found in a backpack he was carrying.

During his suspension, his father wouldn't let him take it easy.

"I said, 'You're not going to just sleep all day,' " he said. " 'Oh, no, you've got chores to do.' I'd be right there watching him."

Little Dennis went through a program at Camp Highfields, and his family sent him to Indianapolis to live with a maternal aunt in an effort to remove him from the influence of friends. He soon returned home.

"Dennis and Debra worked very hard to try to make the best decisions for him with the means they had," Andrea Gibbons said.

His parents weren't comfortable with some of his friends, and Debra banned two of them from the family's home.

Arrested for burglary

In August, Little Dennis was one of several teens arrested for breaking into a clothing store.

It was right around that time that Debra had a heart-to-heart talk with her stepson. He asked her for a cigarette, and she got one for him out of her purse.

She turned around, and "he was right back in my purse again," she said. She made him open his hand and saw that he had two cigarettes.

"I said, 'I gave you one; now you've got two,' " she said. " 'I said, 'You know your dad and me are sometimes careless with money. I had a \$5 bill in there. It could get lost. But who would I blame?' " "

She took his hands in hers.

"I said, 'I love you, I love you, I love you. But you've got to quit this stealing.' " "

A new beginning


Three weeks before his death, his father said, Little Dennis was sentenced to a year's probation for the clothing store incident and assigned to finish school.



He enrolled in a program at Peckham Vocational Center and had planned to start Dec. 19, the day his body was found.

Everyone hoped it would be a new beginning.

"He was trying to step away from the actions he had been taking," Andrea Gibbons said. "He didn't want people looking at him negatively and thinking, 'That's all he is.' "

Contact Kathleen Lavey at 377-1251 or klavey@lsj.com.

StoryChat


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This can't be real!
Mon Jan 08, 2007 12:36 pm

I looked down.....and I saw a picture of dennis on the front page. I thought to myself "uh-oh....what'd he do this time?" But as I studied the picture more, I saw it was his parents.....holding a picture of him and I felt my heart drop. I picked up the paper, bought it and read. I went to Hill with Dennis in 9th grade. Sometimes a couple of Dennis's friends and I would sneak out at lunch and do things we should'nt have. 😞 I never thought that I would be reading about his death in the paper. He was strong and his smile said more than a million words. He was funny and there was never a day I seen him with his head down. yeah... he got in trouble but what kid dont? There is so much I wanna say but if I wrote it I'd be typing forever. I met Dennis's mom and dad also. His mom was in sparrow giving birth to his little brother and my mom was in there for a whole nother reason. They become friends while they were there so thats how I met her. And I met his dad at Hill. I dont know why I am saying all this? I guess I want his mom and dad to remember me so they know they arent the only ones crying and hurting from this.

Dennis, I love you man. You and I shared alot of good times.I cant belive your gone my nigga. Well, I shouldnt say "gone" cuz you aint. You aint gone cuz you still live in my heart, as part of me. I miss you nigga.

"meet u at the crossroads.....so you wont be lonely" 😞😞😞

My prayers are with you
Mon Jan 08, 2007 1:14 am

I just wanted to say that I'm sorry for you (dad) and the rest of your family. I too have a son and cannot imagine what you are going through.

Our prayers are with you & your family in this tragic time.

tragic death of a teen
Sun Jan 07, 2007 10:56 am

I heart goes out to this family. I glad you share your story with us for i have two teen agers and one pre and it a eye opener. YOu don't think when our baby become pre adult that we have to still keep our graud up. We do even more than when they our toddlers. I have pass your story around to all my friends, family, and email room on the hope that ever parent,grandparent, and other members will stop, think, and work hard to reach our future. Our teens. God bless your family and remember he is always with you. 😞

Reader Comment
Sun Jan 07, 2007 10:02 am

We worry about our children's safety when they are toddlers,but sometimes their teen years are a much greater risk.

I think learning disabilities do set in motion a series of possible social issues and esteem issues that can seem overwhelming to the child. I wish the outcome was different for Dennis,because I don't feel he was a bad child.He made a split second decision that many youngsters make in one form or another (crime-drugs-alcohol-risky choices)and he could not reverse it. 😞

My sympathy to his family,who apparently tried hard to help Dennis turn his life around.



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January 5, 2006

COURT: BEST INTEREST HEARINGS MUST PRECLUDE CHILD CUSTODY CHANGES

When a court grants one parent permission to move his or her children more than 100 miles away from the other parent, it must evaluate if the change in domicile is appropriate and then must take into consideration whether it's in the children's best interest to change the established custody arrangement, which would certainly become strained across the distance, the Court of Appeals said on Friday in a published decision.

In a per curium decision, judges remanded the case of *Rittershaus v Rittershaus* ([COA, docket No. 269052](#)) back to the lower court for reconsideration of whether letting Karen Rittersnshaus move to Texas with her two children was in the best interest of the children, considering their father continued to live across the country in Michigan.

The lower court properly evaluated the factors that determine if a change in domicile is appropriate, applying the standard *D'Onofrio* test, said Judges Kurtis Wilder, Kirsten Kelly and Stephen Borrello.

However, they said, because the court failed to then address and analyze the best interest factors required by law when changing the custodial environment, judges remanded the case for further consideration.

FINGERPRINTS EVIDENCE: Fingerprints are not considered hearsay evidence when they are collected during the standard course of business, said the Court of Appeals in a published decision released on Friday. Further, if the person who collected the fingerprints did so without an adversarial relationship to any particular defendant, the person need not be available to testify to satisfy the defendant's right to confrontation.

In the case of *People v Jambor*, ([COA, docket No. 259014](#)), Dwight-Sterling Jambor objected to the admission of fingerprint evidence against him in his trial for intent to commit larceny.

Mr. Jambor said that though normal police business is usually excluded from hearsay determinations, the fingerprint records fell under the exception in a 2003 precedent *People v McDaniel*, in which the court found lab evidence to be untrustworthy because it was prepared in anticipation of litigation.

Judges Mark Cavanagh and Thomas Fitzgerald disagreed, saying the present case is distinguishable from the *McDaniel* case because the fingerprint technician lifted the prints before the police had any suspects, whereas in the *McDaniel* case, the lab technician evaluated evidence with the goal of proving a defendant had committed a crime.

Further, judges said, only objective information was included in the fingerprint technician's report, which also distinguishes this case from previous cases that threw out police evidence as hearsay.

That point also makes moot Mr. Jambor's claim that, because the technician died and couldn't take the stand, his constitutional right to confrontation was violated.

Since the information provided by the technician was objective, other experts could still testify as to his collection practices, appellate judges said. And the technician didn't actually run the prints through the police system; presumably, those who did were available to testify.

Writing separately in a concurring [opinion](#) Judge Jessica Cooper urged the Supreme Court to clarify the boundaries of the law that governs hearsay, asking if the statute should "really stretch so far as to include fingerprint cards prepared by a police officer in the course of an investigation of a crime scene."



Clients in the cold: Lawyer's arrest has ripple effect on cases

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, January 07, 2007

By Ron Fonger

rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317

FLINT - Somewhere in the mountain of paperwork investigators have seized from lawyer Shannon H. Pitcher might be a document that keeps Andre Otis from losing his daughter.

But like others who hired Pitcher to represent them in court, Otis is scrambling to find a last-minute replacement for his lawyer and to recover the case file he said he paid her to build.

"When I saw (Pitcher had been arrested for embezzlement), I thought, 'I'm never going to see my baby again,'" said Otis, who is due in court in just two weeks. "I was just stunned - like, what do I do now?"

It's a question Otis hasn't been alone in asking.

Charged with four counts of embezzlement from a vulnerable adult and ordered to stop practicing law, Pitcher has left dozens of clients' cases in limbo.

Investigators took so many records from her that the Genesee County prosecutor's office now has an entire room dedicated to storing material from her case.

Some of the paperwork belongs to clients who hired Pitcher on their own and who have been left to sort out what to do next.

Unlike cases in which Pitcher was appointed by Genesee County Circuit Court judges, clients who hired her directly haven't had their cases reassigned to new lawyers.

Otis, 41, said he paid Pitcher more than \$4,000 to help win back his 3-year-old daughter from foster care in a Tuscola County court case but isn't sure how much work she actually did.

He is preparing to represent himself on Jan. 16 unless another lawyer agrees to help him and works out a payment plan.

Attorney David Grant, who represents Pitcher, said clients have called his law office looking for help and advice, but neither he nor Pitcher have access to their files.

"It's total chaos," Grant said. "I'm probably spending 10 percent of my time just dealing with (Pitcher's clients who weren't court appointed)."

Grant said he has helped some people with their cases and said Pitcher sent form letters to about 20 private clients, advising them that she could no longer represent them.

QUICK TAKE

What's next for Shannon H. Pitcher's clients?

- In Genesee County cases in which Pitcher was appointed as a legal guardian or conservator - the majority of her caseload - replacement attorneys have been appointed. Replacements also have been named in fewer than 10 cases in which Pitcher had been appointed to represent people accused of a crime.

- In an unknown number of cases - maybe as few as 20 - in which clients hired Pitcher directly, people must find a new attorney on their own.

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The Flint Journal photograph = Jane Hale

Andre Otis of Flint was a client of attorney Shannon H. Pitcher, who faces charges of embezzling from vulnerable adults in other cases. Pitcher has been ordered not

"It's a horrible situation," Grant said. "Everybody is flying by the seat of their pants. I'm like a bat in a cave, trying to figure out where to go."

Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton said his office is working with Pitcher's clients and replacement attorneys so that files can be returned to people trying to take care of divorces, custody and other court matters.

"If somebody wants their file, call us," Leyton said.

to practice law, so Otis and others have been left to find other attorneys or defend themselves, even if they already paid Pitcher to represent them.

The advice could help Otis and others who heard about what happened to their attorney by reading about it in the newspaper or by word of mouth.

Otis said he's been in shock.

"All my aspirations to get my daughter back laid with her," he said. "She convinced me she cared about my daughter, (and now) my back's against the wall."

The state Department of Human Services sued to take away his parental rights in the case he is fighting in Tuscola County.

Danielle Negrete, another Pitcher client in Saginaw County, might have to hire another attorney to draft and file paperwork in a paternity case after already paying Pitcher to do the same thing.

Negrete said she sued Pitcher in small claims court even before the attorney was arrested because she didn't follow through on her case.

"She was very friendly. She made (my case) seem like a piece of cake," said Negrete, 40, who found Pitcher through the telephone book.

She said the experience cost her just \$200 - the initial fee she said she paid Pitcher - but has left her with a bad taste about the legal profession.

"I want my money back," Negrete said. "After this, I don't even want to hire anyone else."

Cynthia Bullington, assistant deputy of the Michigan Attorney Grievance Commission, said clients of lawyers who are no longer able to practice often have to look out for themselves.

Even when the commission takes action against a lawyer's license and requires notices and instructions be sent to clients, there's no guarantee a troubled lawyer will follow through, Bullington said.

There's been no action taken against Pitcher's license by the Attorney Discipline Board. Several people have told The Flint Journal that they have filed complaints against Pitcher with the Grievance Commission but officials there would not discuss any pending complaints.

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Arrest sweeps yield support money But such efforts are rare in Upper Peninsula

By KAYLA GAHAGAN, DMG Writer

LANSING — Almost \$150,000 has been paid in overdue child support in Michigan, thanks to arrest sweeps done by special agents of the Child Support Division.

Attorney General Mike Cox announced in a recent statement that the division conducted the sweeps during the first three weeks of December and worked collaboratively with local law enforcement agencies. Of 38 defendants arrested, \$147,285 has been paid in child support.

“We are very grateful for the support and assistance of sheriff and police departments across this great state in bringing these defendants to justice,” Cox said. “... The responsibility to support children is paramount and I will enforce this statute wherever defendants may be found.”

Sue Kump, enforcement officer for Houghton County’s Friend of the Court, said that it is difficult and rare that arrest sweeps are done in the Upper Peninsula.

“We really don’t have the manpower,” she said.

If a parent is overdue on child support payments, the court can put a warrant out for his or her arrest. The person is usually arrested when the warrant comes up during a traffic violation.

“If there’s someone that I really want, troopers will go and get them for me,” Kump said. “They’re good about that.”

She said unpaid child support is a big problem in the Upper Peninsula, but it is difficult to enforce with little money.

Matt Frendewey, spokesperson for the attorney general, said that they pursued 258 of the oldest arrest warrants for the sweeps.

“We worked with local law enforcement by spending time and contacting them,” he said. Almost all of the arrests, except one or two that were made during traffic violation stops, were made by tracking the person down.

An example of one defendant was Ricky Lee Gilman in Curry County, Ore. Local authorities arrested Gilman Dec. 19. On Dec. 21, Gilman wired \$30,231.99 to Michigan, which was the entire amount of his support obligation.

In less than four years of operation, Cox’s Child Support Division has collected more than \$33 million and directly assisted almost 3,500 children.

Kump said in the case of local arrests, the defendant is brought before a judge who then determines if the parent will serve jail time or not.

Most of the time they are released on bail, she said.

The most recent arrest in the U.P. through the attorney general for unpaid child support was just last week, when a Wayne County woman was arrested by members of the Menominee Police Department.

Kayla Gahagan can be reached at kgahagan@mininggazette.com



State seeks volunteers for foster care board

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Saturday, January 06, 2007

By Ron Fonger

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GENESEE COUNTY - County residents have until Jan. 31 to apply for a position on the Genesee County Foster Care Review Board.

The state Legislature established the citizen review boards in 1984 in an effort to improve the state's foster care system. The advisory boards meet once monthly to review cases of children who have been removed from their homes and placed in foster care due to abuse or neglect.

Those applicants chosen must attend a two-day orientation in Lansing on April 19-20.

To request an application or for more information: (313) 972-3286.

- Ron Fonger

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Fewer Americans are adopting from abroad

China and Russia change their rules

January 7, 2007

BY DAVID CRARY

ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK -- After tripling in the last 15 years, the number of foreign children adopted by Americans dropped sharply in 2006, the result of factors that have jolted adoption advocates and prompted many would-be parents to reconsider their options.

Declines were recorded last year in nearly all countries that have been the top sources of adopted children, in particular China, Russia, South Korea and Ukraine.

Increases from less familiar alternatives -- Ethiopia, Liberia, Haiti and Vietnam -- partly offset the drop, but some experts believe the era of soaring foreign adoption has ended.

"The huge growth rates you saw in the '90s -- I think that's over," said Thomas DiFilipo, president of the Joint Council on International Children's Services.

He urged Americans considering international adoption to "reassess any preconceived notions they have ... and get educated on the myriad options that are available."

Overall, the State Department reports, international adoptions by Americans dropped to 20,679 in fiscal 2006 from 22,728 in 2005, the first significant decline since 1992.

Adoptions from China, the No. 1 source of children since 2000, fell 18% from 7,906 to 6,493. Adoptions from Russia, the No. 2 source for the past six years, dropped about 20% to a 10-year low of 3,706.

Both are among nations trying to reform their child welfare systems and increase domestic adoptions.

In some cases, reform campaigns are coupled with skepticism toward foreign adoption, including concern about occasional cases of abuse. Romania bans adoptions by foreigners except for relatives. Ukraine and Kazakhstan insist that foreign parents submit reports on adopted children.

Thomas Atwood, president of the National Council for Adoption, said the drop in foreign adoptions is both understandable and worrisome.

He sees potential for increased U.S. adoptions from Brazil, Mexico and India.

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Published January 8, 2007

Day care union drive

State subsidized providers target of UAW, AFSCME

By Barbara Wieland
Lansing State Journal

Caring for other people's children - feeding them, wiping their noses and teaching them their ABCs - might not be everyone's cup of tea.

But Charlene Webster would not want to do anything else.

"I love it, I really do," the Holt child care provider said. "I love the kids and I have some really great parents."

But Webster has an issue. She and about 36,000 others who receive state subsidies to provide child care think it's time for a raise. After all, they haven't had one in 10 years.

The child care workers have banded together under the banners of the United Auto Workers and the AFSCME union to lobby for better pay, more training and health care insurance.

The unions and an organization representing the state are expected to start hammering out the details of a contract later this month.

Subsidized providers

Parents who don't receive subsidies from the state to help pay for child care likely won't notice the change. But those who do get assistance from the state may soon be paying less for day care.



(Photo by Becky Shink / Lansing State Journal)
Working with kids: Charlene Webster, owner of Babes & Tots, works with children she is caring for while they color pictures. She has been in business for more than 13 years.

Asking for assistance

- Unionized child care workers will begin negotiating a contract with the state later this month
- Better pay: Workers are seeking an increase to the rate the state pays for subsidized child care. It hasn't been increased in 10 years.
- Benefits: Workers also want health care and other benefits
- Training: The contract could also include more opportunities for child care education

By the numbers

36,000: Number of child care workers seeking an increase in the amount the state reimburses them for subsidized child care

60,626: Families in Michigan who receive state assistance in paying for child care

114,494: Children in Michigan whose child care is partially funded by the state

\$1.35: The lowest amount, per hour, that the state reimburses child care workers for subsidized care

\$2.50: The maximum rate the state subsidizes. The state also pays for child care setting

\$3.91: The average cost, per hour charged by child care centers to care for a baby less than a year old.

\$378.3 million: The estimated funds the Michigan

And the unions will benefit by gaining visibility and a large number of new members at a time when union membership is shrinking.

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"They're showing an interest in what we have to say and are giving us a voice," said Webster, who is licensed to care for six children in her home. She currently cares for one child who receives a state subsidy.

Webster and others who provide state-subsidized child care haven't seen a pay increase from the state in 10 years. The rate the state pays them varies by county and ranges from \$1.35 an hour to \$2.50 an hour.

But the going rate for child care in Michigan can be as much as \$3.91 per hour, which leaves parents to pay the difference - a sum that can be nearly \$100 a week.

"There are a lot of people that really struggle with it," Webster said.

Day care supporters

Michelle Perry understands the high cost of paying for child care and the needs of providers. She sends two children, ages 3 and 5 1/2, to Webster's house.

"(Providers) need the benefits," she said. "They need to be healthy just like we do."

It's one reason Perry supports Webster and others in their quest to obtain a bargaining contract with the state.

Perry doesn't receive a state subsidy to help pay for child care, but parents who do could benefit from the new deal. If the state starts to reimburse child care workers at a greater rate, narrowing the gap between what child care providers charge and how much the state subsidizes, parents might pay less out-of-pocket. But that will depend on the details of the contract.

The rate the state sets for reimbursement depends on how much child care costs in a given area, said Lisa Brewer Walraven, a policy adviser for early childhood policy in Michigan's Department of Human Services.

As of November, there were 60,626 families with 114,494 children receiving state help for child care costs.

Unknown impact

"It's unknown at this point how a contract will affect the subsidy payments," Walraven said.

"All this has to be worked out," said Albert Garrett, president of AFSCME Michigan Council 25 in Detroit.

AFSCME has organized child care providers in other states. Several Western states, such as Oregon and Washington, have organized providers, and nearby states such as Ohio are working on similar arrangements.

In Michigan, AFSCME is being joined by the United Auto Workers union, which represents workers at some child care centers and established some child care benefits for auto workers.

Membership boost

Garrett said approximately 20,000 child care workers would become members of AFSCME, while the remaining 16,000 would join the UAW. The same contract will apply to workers in both unions.

The unions stand to gain members and dues from the child care workers.

Unions have fought to stem the tide of slipping membership in recent years. Last year, union membership fell to 12.5 percent of all workers in the United States.

The percentage was unchanged from 2004, but down from a high of 20.1 percent in 1983, the first year for which comparable union data are available.

But the unions also state ideological reasons for organizing child care providers.

"We've been deeply involved to promote quality child care for many years," said Elizabeth Bunn, secretary-treasurer for the International UAW.

Bunn said increasing state subsidies is only one goal of the union. It also wants to bring more training opportunities and benefits to child care workers.

"We want to improve the delivery of child care, and a key part of that is helping the people providing child care," Bunn said.

Garrett said it only makes sense to make sure that people who work with children are able to take care of their own health.

"We think the world of our children, but we don't treat the people who take care of them well enough," he said.

Contact Barbara Wieland at 267-1348 or bwieland@lsj.com.

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Article published Jan 6, 2007

Charity sets moratorium on dropoffs

Donations pile up at Goodwill; cash woes close Sandusky site

By NICOLE GERRING
Times Herald

The bags of clothing heaped atop Goodwill Industries drop boxes are not a sign the nonprofit is short staffed.

They are the result of generous giving during the holiday season, said Phil Papes, executive director of Goodwill Industries of St. Clair County.

Goodwill stores in Port Huron Township and Marysville are not accepting donations because of an excess supply of clothing from donors and from a closed store in Sandusky.

The store at 47 Dawson St. closed in late October, Papes said, because it was not generating enough revenue to support the nonprofit's mission of helping the unemployed and disabled train for and find jobs.

The Sandusky store opened six to eight years ago, Papes said. Although the store made enough money through clothing sales to pay its bills, it wasn't selling enough to fulfill the organization's mission.

The store's four employees were laid off, Papes said.

Irene Waller, director of the Sanilac County Department of Human Services, said county residents need places to buy discounted clothing.

"We certainly have the need in our community, and we have a lot of people who like to donate during our Christmas holidays," she said. "(St. Clair) is a larger county so we could always use something in our small county here."

There are other places to donate and buy used clothing and furniture in Sanilac County, Waller said, such as Project Blessing in Carsonville and Brown City.

The Goodwill Industries stores in Marysville and Port Huron Township remain open but have stopped taking donations.

The organization refuses donations a few times a year when its inventory becomes too full, Papes said.

"I just have too many donations and too small a space," Papes said. "It's a matter of timing. We will work through it. I just need more buyers. We are selling our way out of this blessing that we have."

He said Goodwill is not looking for more volunteers and will probably begin accepting donations again next week.

Maj. Tim Meyer of the Salvation Army Port Huron Citadel Corps said his organization had to refuse donations before a back portion of their building was renovated.

The Salvation Army mainly serves St. Clair County residents but extends help to Sanilac County residents in need, Meyer said.

"We help many families that are in the area in Sanilac County that are right close to our county line," he said.



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Published January 7, 2007

City now accepting grant apps

By FRAN WILCOX
Staff Writer

EAST LANSING — The city of East Lansing is currently accepting applications from human service agencies for two 2007-08 grant programs: The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program and the general fund human service activities grant.

On Wednesday, Jan. 10, the city will hold a grant application workshop for first-time applicants.

The grants and the workshop are both annual happenings, community development administrator Tim Dempsey said.

"We typically provide the workshop every year, so anyone who's not familiar with the process can come in. We'll review the application with them and explain to them how the different programs vary," Dempsey said.

The programs are similar, but there are some differences.

Both grants are for agencies that provide care to low-income residents, Dempsey said.

"People who are served through the grants have to qualify as low or moderate income," Dempsey said. "Whether they're extremely low income and in a poverty situation or simply struggling to make ends meet, that's the intent of both of the programs, to serve the underprivileged population."

The CDBG is funded by the federal government, while the general fund human services grant is funded by the city, Dempsey said. The city has more leeway in granting its funds than the federal government's funds.

"They're both human services funds," Dempsey said. "The difference is the money tends to be more flexible [for the general fund grant]. Federal money has a lot of very specific guidelines in terms of what it can be used for."

For example, Dempsey said, none of the CDBG money can be used for marketing. The city's grant, however, could potentially allow for marketing use of money.

In addition, while both programs are geared toward agencies that serve East Lansing residents, the federal money is more strict about it because some surrounding communities also receive CDBG money, Dempsey said.

First-time applicants with questions about the specifications or applications are welcome to attend the workshop, Dempsey said. According to a release from the city of East Lansing, the workshop will be held Wednesday, Jan. 10 at 4 p.m. in conference room A of East Lansing City Hall, 410

Abbott Rd.

Those interested are asked to register by calling (517) 319-6930, but pre-registration is not required, Dempsey said.

The workshop will include an overview and time for questions, Dempsey said.

"The applications are not terribly long, but if you're not familiar with them, people often have questions," Dempsey said. "We've found it's easier to review that with them ahead of time."

Agencies often receive funding from the grants multiple years, Dempsey said, so many are already familiar with the process.

Last year, about \$93,000 was available for the CDBG program, Dempsey said. That money was divided between seven different agencies, with individual grant amounts ranging from \$3,000 to \$20,000.

The most recent general fund human services grant included \$103,000, which funded about 20 different agencies, according to Dempsey.

Dempsey said past recipients of the grants have included Haven House, EVE, the Center for Independent Living, Child Abuse Prevention Services, the Greater Lansing Food Bank's Gardening and Gleaning Project, the Elder Law Clinic and the Tri-County Office on Aging.

Grant applications are due by Thursday, Jan. 25 at 5 p.m. Applications can be requested through the city's planning department at (517) 319-6930 or downloaded from the city's Web site, www.cityofeastlansing.com.

During the month of February, Dempsey said, a community development advisory committee reviews all the applications and makes a recommendation to the human relations commission. The commission then makes a recommendation to the city council, which generally approves the funding during its regular budget cycle, usually around April.

Distribution of the grants begins at the start of the city's fiscal year, which is July 1. The grants follow a reimbursement process, so as the agencies spend money, they request reimbursement.

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